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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 000355

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [ECON](#) [PM](#)
SUBJECT: PANAMA: PMG TELLS PRD LEADERSHIP WON'T RUN FOR
RE-ELECTION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Luis Arreaga. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Panamanian National Assembly President Pedro Miguel Gonzalez (PMG) informed President Martin Torrijos in writing on May 4 of his "irrevocable decision to decline any aspiration on his part to preside over the National Assembly as of September 1." (Note: PMG remains under U.S. federal indictment in conjunction with the 1992 murder of a U.S. serviceman.) First VP and FM Samuel Lewis provided Charge a copy of this letter on May 4. The letter was addressed to Torrijos in his capacity as Secretary General of the governing Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD). PMG is the PRD CEN 2nd Sub-Secretary. On May 4, previewing this news with POLCOUNS, PRD National Executive Committee (CEN) 5th Sub-Secretary Rodrigo "Rod" Diaz said that the PRD would begin the process of looking for a new National Assembly President and hoped to have identified PMG's successor by late June/early July. Washington should gird itself for a full-court press by the Panamanians led by President Torrijos to move the U.S.-Panama TPA forward for congressional action. End summary.

Torrijos: Washington Visit to Promote TPA

2. (C) The purpose of the visit to Washington was "to promote the trade agreement with the United States," President Torrijos announced as he departed a ceremony at which he signed a contract with Caterpillar to establish a Caterpillar facility at the former Howard U.S. Air Force Base outside Panama City. Lewis passed a copy of PMG's letter to Charge on the margins of this event. Answering journalists questions, Torrijos commented that PMG would not run for reelection as President of the National Assembly.

Choosing PMG's Successor

3. (C) PRD CEN 5th Sub-Secretary Rodrigo "Rod" Diaz told POLCOUNS on May 4 that the CEN had unanimously agreed that PMG would not run for re-election as President of the National Assembly. Diaz underscored the unanimity of the decision, noting that PMG, the CEN's 2nd Sub-Secretary, had

supported the decision as well. Diaz explained that the PRD National Assembly deputies, who hold 45 of the chambers 75 seats, would begin the process of selecting a successor to PMG. "We hope to have selected a new National Assembly President by the end of June or early July," Diaz said. "We don't want to leave this hanging until a couple of weeks before the National Assembly is re-opened on September 1 as we did last year." (Note: Given the PRD's dominance of the legislature, PRD deputies can hand pick the chamber's president.)

The Letter

14. (SBU) Begin text of unofficial translation:

Panama, May 4, 2008
Comrade
Martin Torrijos Espino
Secretary General
Democratic Revolutionary Party

Esteemed comrade:

This letter's purpose is to state to the party's directorate my irrevocable decision to decline any aspiration to preside over the National Assembly starting next September 1. Therefore, I consider it necessary that the National Executive Committee assess the possibility of bringing forward the selection of our party's proposal for late June or early July.

As it is known, our party is immersed in the selection process of our candidacies to all popularly elected positions for next year's general elections and, although we have not adopted a formal decision, we have agreed in principle to carry out this exercise during the month of August. Due to various reasons, I think it would be most prudent to differentiate the timing of both exercises, so we may prevent as much as possible, that the competition for national leadership positions be reflected internally in our party at the moment of making such an important decision.

Thanking my party for the support that it provided me during the difficult moments that I faced when assuming such an important responsibility and with the satisfaction of having endured with determination and steadfastness the attacks to our sovereignty and democratic institution, I remain,

/signed/
Pedro Miguel Gonzalez Pinzon
Third Deputy Secretary (Sub-Secretary) General

cc: Members of the National Executive Committee

End text of unofficial translation.

Comment

14. (C) Torrijos is clearly striving to remove PMG as an impediment to U.S. congressional action on the pending U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA) on the eve of his May 5-8 visit to Washington. Washington audiences can expect to hear that now that the PMG issue has been resolved, the U.S.-Panama TPA should be moved to the Hill, including jumping the queue ahead of the U.S.-Colombia TPA. To the best of post's knowledge, a written promise not to run for election or re-election is unprecedented in Panamanian politics. In securing this extraordinary written commitment from PMG, Torrijos is hoping to breath new life into this marquee objective for his administration in the hope of seeing the TPA implement before he leaves office on July 1, 2009, but more ideally before Panama's May 3, 2009 general elections. Washington should gird itself for a full-court press by the Panamanians to move the U.S.-Panama TPA forward

for congressional action.
ARREAGA